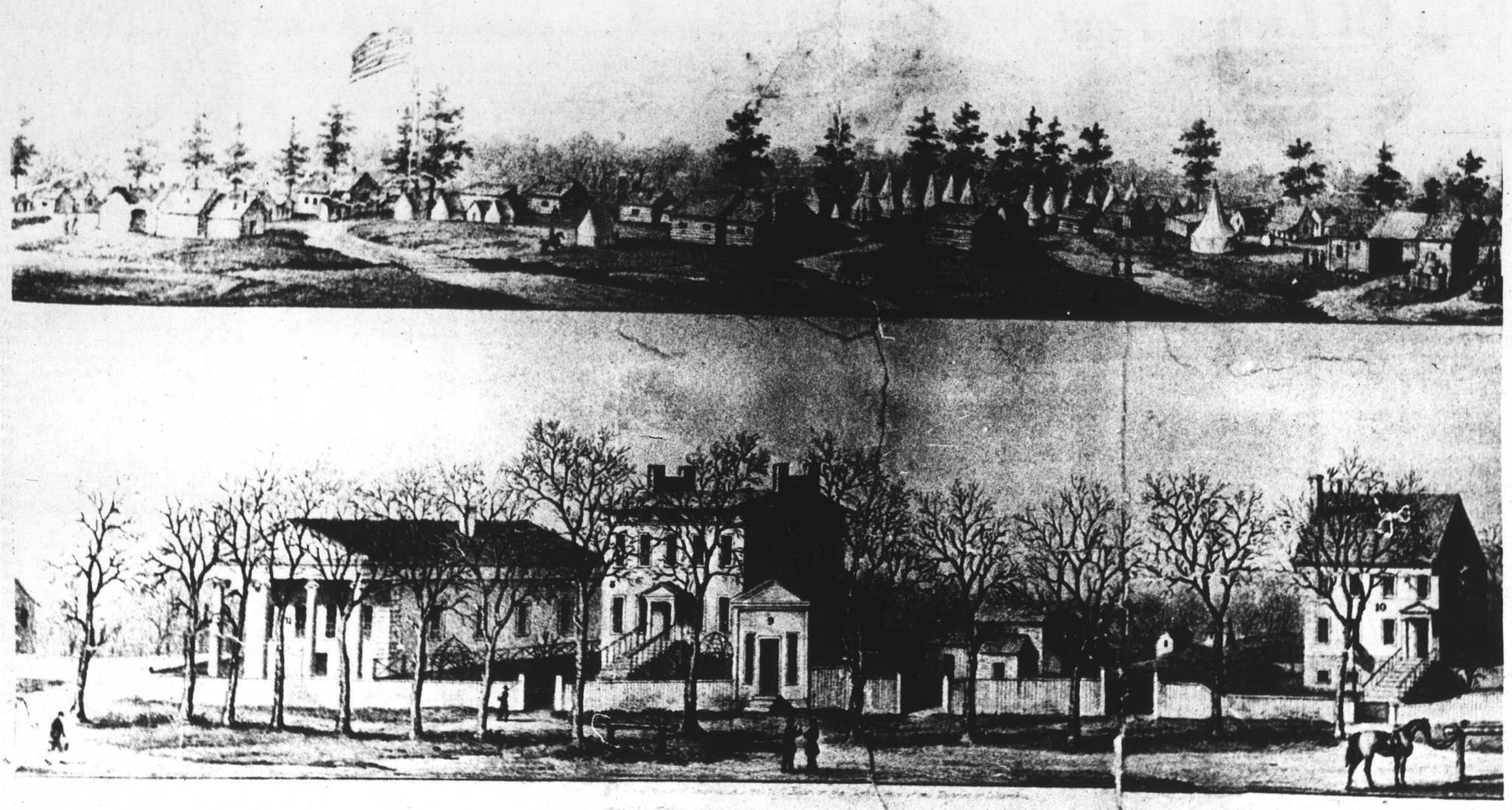


The old drawings show the Union camp of General Peck at Suffolk in 1863 (top) and the general's headquarters on Main Street (below). The county courthouse is at the far left with Riddick's Folley next to it.

Shouting Match Snowballed To Bloody Melee

By
Prof. Maurice Ross
Purdue University

In Boston, Mass., just east of the Old State House, at the intersection of State and Congress streets, there is a circle of paving stones marking one of the most propagandized incidents of the American Revolution that is known as the Boston Massacre.

There, on March 5,1770, a mob of about 60 men provoked a guard of some 10 British regulars to fire, killing three citizens on the spot and wounding seven, two of whom died later.

Trouble had been brewing for a long time between the customs officers and the merchants who, with the support of all the rowdies available, had chased the British functionaries out of town. In order to protect the customs men and their families, two regiments were marched into Boston and encamped on the Common. It became great sport for idle Bostonians to shout insults at thes "bloody backs," as the natives called the soldiers.

They would yell, "Lobsters for sale!" "Lobsters here!" "Who wants lobsters?"

On March 2, one of the king's off-duty redcoats was leisurely walking along as the snow fell more heavily. When he passed John Greg's ropewalk, a ropemaker shouted:

"Hi, lobster! Do you want work?"

Of course, His Majesty's men could always use money. The young man nodded affirmatively. The big guy replied. "Go clean out the public privy."

Bitter and crushed, the soldier scowled for a while, then mumbled at the closed windows of the building, and finally shrieked insults. Some time later another ropemaker came out and knocked the Englishman down into the mud and wet snow. His comrades answered the call for help, and a gang fight broke out. An English officer who was acting as a peacemaker caught a hard snowball right on the face.

During the next two days more snowballs and insults were hurled by each side. As the temperature got colder, tempers got hotter, while the snow was turning into ice. On the third day, the thing was to throw frozen chunks at somebody's head.

At about nine o'clock in the evening a crowd gathered. Epithets were exchanged; someone questioned another's legitimacy, somebody was hit, and the sentry shouted for help. Captain Preston rushed out with a squad of men. The crowd pressed closer, yelling, taunting: "Go ahead, fire, Fire, damn you! Fire, you lobsters!"

A big stick came flying through the air and knocked a soldier down. Heaven only knows what followed. Anyway, a shot rang out. It struck the apparent leader of the mob, Crispus Attucks. He screamed and fell on his face, dead!

Some said he was a runaway slave; others said he was an Indian, and to complicate his identity even more, compromisers say he was an Indian with Negro blood, or Negro with Indian blood.

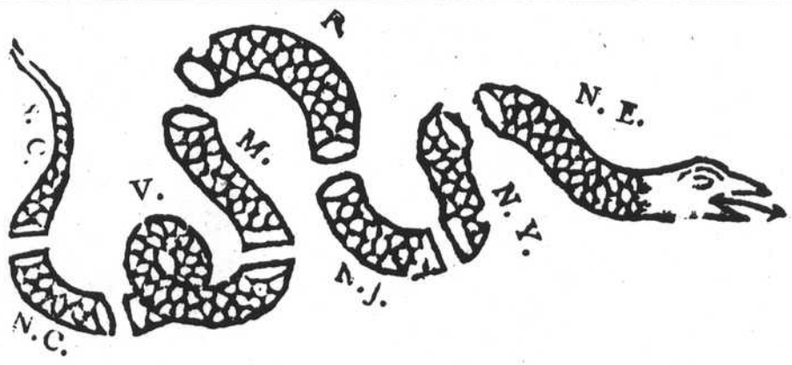
There were more shots and the forementioned tragedy occurred. Captain Preston and his men were tried and John Adams defended them. The officer and four soldiers were acquitted, two convicted of manslaughter, but released and discharged from the army after being branded on the hand.

The British Troops were force to move to Castle William.

Rabblerouser Samuel Admas was accused of plotting the entire affair, but no charge was ever proved. He did, however, have Paul Revere engrave the scene, grossly falsifying the event, which was fully exploited as proof of British guilt, relentlessly beating the drum loudly for "the martyrs of liberty struck down by the bloody butchers."

In fact, the Boston Massacre was an unfortunate incident which became the first great consolidator of outspoken liberal opinion directed at the mother country. Subsequently, when the 1887 Massachusetts legislature voted a memorial to the victims, the Massachusetts Historical Society protested, declaring "nothing but a missapprehension of the event styled the 'Boston Massacre' can lead go classifying these persons with those entitled to grateful recognition at the public expense."

So the bloody misunderstanding known as the Boston Massacre was instigated by a handful of radicals who were not at all concerned about the welfare of the public. It was never the real issue.



JOIN, or DIE.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN created this symbol and published it in the "Pennsylvania Gazette," May 9, 1754, on the eve of the French and Indian War. It was revived during the Revolution when colonial unity again became an issue. (Library of Congress)

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